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A cross-cultural gender analysis of the pragmatic functions of conceptual metaphor in Spanish and English newspapers

Abstract: Most gender studies performed from a cognitive perspective focus on the description of metaphors underlying the conceptualization of men and women in different cultures. Little attention has been paid so far to gender-related aspects of the pragmatic uses of conceptual metaphors. This paper analyzes a corpus of opinion columns by two groups of contemporary Spanish and English journalists (male versus female journalists) with a view to identifying the pragmatic functions of the cognitive metaphors found in their discourse. Such metaphors have turned out to act as either mitigating or intensifying devices of the writers' claims. From a gender perspective, a tendency has been observed for male journalists to use conceptual metaphors in order to intensify axiologically negative opinions or descriptions, while female journalists tend to make use of them for the mitigation of negative descriptions. In both cases, metaphor is also used for the creation of humor, but while male journalists do so by means of downgrading others, female journalists repeatedly play themselves down in an attempt to gain the readers' sympathy through laughter. These general tendencies have been found to be largely modulated by culture-specific pragmatic factors (i.e. preference for indirectness) and maxims (i.e. Modesty and Approbation).

Keywords: gender, pragmatics, cognitive metaphor, journalism discourse, humor

1 Introduction

Granted that metaphor is a universal conceptual device used by speakers of all languages regardless of their gender, the question of whether both men

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and women actually use metaphorical mappings for the same communicative purposes and with the same frequency of occurrence remains unanswered. This paper represents an attempt to investigate this issue by delving into the largely unexplored territory of the connections among the realms of gender, pragmatic functions, and conceptual metaphor. More specifically, the article focuses on the gender-based similarities and differences between English and Spanish journalists with regard to the pragmatic uses of cognitive metaphor.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 offers a revision of the literature on the topic under scrutiny, and provides a theoretical account of the main analytical tool used in this study (i. e. cognitive metaphor). Section 3 narrows down the research objectives and dwells on various methodological issues as well as on the nature of the corpus for analysis. Sections 4 and 5 illustrate the findings of this study for the Spanish and English data, respectively. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the results and points to areas still in need of research.

2 Research on gender-related aspects of language and cognitive metaphor

Research on gender differences in the use of language has been carried out at all levels of linguistic description. Lakoff (1975), Tannen (1990, 1993), Holmes (1995), and Coates (2004), among others, have pointed to gender-based traits in the lexicon (e. g. women use more precise color descriptors and more empty adjectives), in syntax (e. g. women make a more extensive use of question tags), in phonology (e. g. women tend to use a rising intonation pattern which characteristically turns their declarative statements into questions), and in the pragmatic use of language (e. g. women use indirect speech acts more often and, therefore, their speech comes out as more polite). Since the first highly popular, but also probably too far-fetched statements on the way men and women talk differs, studies on gender-specific traits of speech have widely diversified and have been pursued from a variety of perspectives including functionalism (Miettinen and Watson 2013), discourse analysis (Abramo 2011) and conversation analysis (Geluykens and Limberg 2012).

From the 1990s onwards, both the construction of gender through language and the potential influence of gender in language use have also been fruitfully approached from the standpoint of Cognitive Linguistics. Most of the contemporary work on language and gender carried out from this perspective has

focused on the description of the cognitive metaphors and, to a lesser extent, metonymies that underlie the conceptualization of men and women in different cultures. Among these studies, there are those of Hines (2000), Maalej (1999) and Nilsen (1996) about the animal, plants, and food-based metaphors of women; that of Stirling (1987) about the role of metaphors and metonymies in the definition of women in Australian newspapers; and that of Hiraga (1991) about how conventional metaphorical expressions about women in modern Japanese have influenced their customs and behavior. For a more detailed overview of the current literature on metaphor and the construction of gender, see Schmitt (2009).

More recently, cognitive linguists have shown a shift of interest from the issue of how men and women are depicted through metaphor toward the study of gendered-based particularities in the actual use of metaphor as a communicative device. This is the case with Juanhong's (2012) study on the frequency of use of the metaphorical senses of the verb *touch* by men and women. Another area of interest deals with gender-related differences in the use of metaphor in specific types of discourse. Thus, Charteris-Black (2012) has compared the types of metaphor used by men and women in talking about depression. The study of metaphor in relation to discourse has also focused on gendered metaphors and their effects on discourse and social world construction, as in Koller's (2004) in-depth analysis of the gender-biased metaphors that structure the discourse of business media discourse, or in Silaski's (2012) work on the gendered metaphor of SLENDERNESS and its role on the conceptualization of an ideal company and how seemingly harmless metaphors support and reconstruct an androcentric world view in economic texts. In a similar vein, Schalk (2013) delves into the metaphor of disability and explores its effects on the marginalization of disempowered groups in general and disabled people in particular in the feminist discourse.

To the best of our knowledge, however, little attention has been paid to the pragmatic functions of cognitive metaphors and the potential differences in their use by men and women. Research on cognitive metaphor has flourished since Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), Lakoff (1987), and Lakoff and Turner (1989) published their seminal works on the issue. Cognitive metaphors have been shown to go beyond language and to explain how our minds get hold of the world by making use of concrete notions (source domains) in order to understand others that are of a more abstract nature (target domains). In Lakoff and Johnson's words (1980: 5), "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." More specifically, cognitive metaphors consist in establishing a number of systematic correspondences between the two domains involved.

A well-known example of conceptual metaphor, ARGUMENT IS WAR, involves the following set of correspondences:

– People arguing are opponents
– Opinions are positions
– Criticizing an argument is attacking
– Convincing one's opponent is gaining ground
– Success in persuasion is military victory

As noted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 4), the metaphorical structuring of the concept of ARGUMENT in terms of the notion of WAR is reflected in many expressions of our everyday language such as *Your claims are indefensible*, *He attacked every weak point in my argument*, *I've never won an argument with him*, or *He shot down all my arguments*. Together with this type of *structural metaphor*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) distinguished two more types, namely, orientational and ontological metaphors. *Orientational metaphors* are those which "give a concept a spatial orientation" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 14). They underlie, for example, our understanding of *happiness* and *sadness* in terms of *verticality* (e. g. *I'm high in spirits* or *I'm feeling down today*), and *emotions* in terms of *containment* (e. g. *I am in anger, He has fallen out of love*). *Ontological metaphors* represent abstractions as if they were concrete entities (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 25–34). Thus, the VISUAL FIELD IS A CONTAINER metaphor, for example, allows us to conceptualize what we see as being inside a "visual" container (e. g. *The ship came into view*). This threefold distinction will be of relevance to our analysis, structural metaphors being the most productive in relation to our data (see Sections 4 and 5).

From the 1980s to present times, research on cognitive metaphor has revealed its pervasiveness at all levels of linguistic description, including among others the construction of discourse (Semino 2008), specialized languages (Pérez-Hernández 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2016; Tercedor Sánchez et al. 2012), and narrative (Pérez-Hernández 1997; Stockwell 2002). In this connection metaphor plays a significant role in *highlighting and/or hiding* specific aspects of a metaphorically rendered notion, thus allowing the writer/speaker to subtly control the direction of the discourse. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 10) emphasized, "in allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (e. g., the battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor." As shall be shown in Sections 4 and 5, this is the case with most of the metaphors in our corpus. In addition, cognitive metaphor has also been shown to contribute to the cohesiveness of a discourse or a conversation (Ponterotto 2003). This textual function will also be dealt with in relation to some of the examples analyzed in Sections 4 and 5.

3 Methodology, corpus and research objectives

The present study has been carried out in strict accordance with several methodological decisions that aim to avoid or, at the very least, minimize potential biases. To begin with, research findings are often interpreted on the basis of stereotyped assumptions about men and women. Thus, if a text written by a woman is globally compared to one written by a man, we are likely to encounter differences which could easily be simple features of their own personal style, but which nevertheless could mistakenly be included in the rag bag of sex differences for the lack of a better explanation. Such confusions could be easily avoided by performing more fine-grained comparisons at the level of discourse micro-features. Thus, the present comparison of male/female newspaper opinion columns looks closely at a number of pragmatic functions rather than attempting to compare the characteristics of the texts in a holistic manner.

The specific pragmatic functions that have been isolated for this analysis are among the most frequent of this genre and they will be compared both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. Therefore, attention is paid not only to whether men and women do in fact exploit the same construct (i. e. cognitive metaphor) in the realization of those pragmatic functions, but also to the nature and purposes of such exploitation. In an attempt to maximize the qualitative aspects of the analysis, the number of the discourse functions under scrutiny has been limited to those of (i) *representation of reality (mainly as related to the description of people)*, (ii) *criticism (i. e. negative descriptions),* and (iii) *praising (i. e. positive descriptions)*. The criteria on which the choice of the aforementioned functions was based included their frequency of appearance in the corpus of analysis and their centrality as defining characteristics of the genre under scrutiny. A preliminary analysis of the opinion columns included in our corpus revealed these three functions to be the most frequent in this genre. This is only to be expected since the aim of opinion columns is to present a propositional content from the point of view of the writer, and such a perspective often displays a subjective axiological stance. A fourth function, namely that of *persuasion*, was also found to be essential to the nature of opinion columns. However, this latter function was often also found to be a byproduct or consequence of the skilled use that writers made of the three previous factors (i. e. representation of reality, criticism and/or praising). For this reason, the analysis was limited to the latter.

As pointed out above, one of the most recurrent weaknesses of contemporary gender studies stems from their tendency to highlight the differences between groups and ignore the differences within them in such a way that

they may overlook the fact that men and women belonging to similar social groups/classes may have more in common among themselves than women who fall within diverse social categories. Taking this into account, the texts that make up the corpus of analysis have been selected in such a way that inner group differences are minimized so as to allow for gender-based differences among group members to be highlighted. Thus, all journalists under consideration belong to a similar intellectual Spanish/English middle class, they are members of the same cultural generation, share a progressive ideological stance, and write in liberal newspapers. Their opinion columns are of a similar length. Furthermore, all the texts under scrutiny stand out for their critical stamina and their vivid interpretations of reality. All other things being equal, therefore, it should be expected that those differences that may be found in their use of the aforementioned discourse functions will be due to or at least largely influenced by the authors' own gender-tinted perception of language and reality.

Our corpus consists of 150 articles for each of the four groups of journalists under consideration (i. e. Spanish versus English, male versus female). The total sum of 600 articles has finally rendered 540 cognitive metaphors by Spanish journalists, and 853 metaphors by English columnists. The articles where the metaphors were found belong to the writers' weekly/daily opinion columns in some of the most popular Spanish and English newspapers. The texts were written between January 2005 and April 2014 in *XL Semanal*, *El País, The Observer* and *The Guardian*. The articles can be freely accessed on the Internet (see the references section for the specific URL addresses) and they were selected on the basis of their accessibility (open source) and productivity as regards the three discursive micro-functions that are the object of this study (i. e. description of people, criticism and praising).

Finally, as pointed out in Section 2, there seems to be a generalized lack of interest in the role played by the pragmatic uses of cognitive mappings (i. e. cognitive metaphor and metonymy) in the construction of gender and the female/male discourse. In this respect, the present paper poses the following working question: Do men and women use cognitive metaphors for different purposes in their discourse? In order to answer this question, several specific research objectives have been established. The first one is to isolate the three aforementioned pragmatic functions in the corpus of newspaper articles under consideration. The second one involves the investigation of the role played by cognitive metaphor in their realization. Special attention will be paid to the presence or absence of this cognitive operation, as well as to the aim with which it has been used when it does play a role in the expression of the aforementioned pragmatic functions. The final objective is to compare the results of our analysis of both the male and the female journalists corpora for the two

languages under consideration with a view to ascertaining whether there are any significant differences between them in their pragmatic uses of cognitive metaphors. Restricting our study to a limited number of pragmatic functions within one discourse genre, and building up our corpus of study with data from four largely homogeneous groups of writers should make those gender differences all the more evident provided that they actually exist.

4 Spanish data analysis

At first sight, our corpus of study does not reveal any relevant quantitative differences in the overall amount of metaphorical mappings used by male and female Spanish journalists. Both groups make use of conceptual metaphors in the description and representation of the people they write about in their opinion columns to a similar extent. The 150 articles written by male journalists have yielded 252 conventional cognitive metaphors in the description of people, while the 150 articles by female journalists have rendered a slightly higher, but still very similar figure of 288 metaphorical mappings. A more detailed qualitative analysis of the data, however, does reveal some significant findings, which will be explained in detail in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 below. For the sake of clarity, the findings have been grouped in two categories depending on whether the description of people is positive (praising) or whether such description is negative (criticism).

4.1 Axiologically positive/neutral descriptions (praising)

Most of the descriptions in our corpus that display a positive/neutral axiology are literal, both in the female and the male journalists' texts. The indirectness inherent to metaphorical mappings does not seem to be necessary in the task of providing positive/neutral descriptions of people, or in praising them. The following are some illustrative examples:

(1)   (Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *XL Semanal*, 27 August 2006)
       una niña de diez años, tostada de agua y sol; una niña intrépida y hecha a todo eso, capaz de leer, impávida, La isla del tesoro en su litera de proa
       'a ten-year old girl, tanned by the water and the sun; an intrepid girl who was used to all that, capable of reading *Treasure Island*, fearless, while lying in her bunk'

(2)   (Elvira Lindo, *El País*, 26 February 2006)
        *un chino elegante, anciano [...] ese hombre que es un genio, el arquitecto
        M. Pei*
        'an elegant Chinese, an elder man, [...] that man, who is a genius, the
        architect M. Pei'

Only a small number of articles display instances of positive descriptions containing a cognitive metaphor. Example (3) below is one of the 27 occurrences found in our corpus.

(3)   (Tania Adam, *El País*, 11 March 2014)
        Hasna El Becharia (Algeria, 1950)
        *La rockera del desierto o la poeta del <u>gnawa</u>, así llaman a esta <u>luchadora</u>
        que se atrevió a aprender a tocar el <u>guembri</u> a escondidas, un instrumento
        de cuerda reservado en Argelia solo para los hombres.*
        'Hasna El Becharia (Algeria, 1950)
        The female rock singer of the desert or the *gnawa* poet, so is called this
        fighter who dared to learn to play the *guembri* in the shadows, a string
        instrument which is reserved only for men in Algeria.'

In (3), the description of the singer Hasna El Becharia is sprinkled with an instance of the metaphorical mapping PIONEERS ARE FIGHTERS (against tradition), which combines with the rest of the positive literal statements about this woman to render her depiction all the more vivid and laudatory.

    Positive descriptions of people involving the use of cognitive metaphors are rare in the corpus. Those few occurrences that have been encountered, nevertheless, correspond mainly to the journalists' self-descriptions and are more frequent in the writings of female journalists in approximately a 5-to-1 ratio. As a matter of fact, self-references in female texts often exploit well-known everyday-life metaphorical mappings which help the writer to present herself in a way intended to gain the readers' support and sympathy. The following excerpt is a prototypical sample:

(4)   (Elvira Lindo, *El País*, 12 March 2006)
        *Yo tengo ya caparazón, se lo aseguro, pero ha habido momentos en que la
        pobre persona que llevo dentro se ha puesto a llorar con la cabeza en el
        pupitre.*
        'I already have a hard shell, trust me, but there have been times when the
        poor person inside me has burst out crying with her head on the [school]
        desk.'

Lindo makes use of the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor in presenting herself as a hard-shelled animal and, therefore, as a tough independent person who is unlikely to let other people's judgments influence her.[1] Her self-portrait goes on to exploit the DIVIDED SELF metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 269), according to which a human being is metaphorically conceptualized as an ensemble of a *subject* (rationality) and a *self* (emotions). The subject is generally understood as the public, exterior part of a person, while the self is thought of as something more private and interior. The interplay between those two metaphors is fairly productive since each of them highlights a different aspect of the journalist's personality. She presents herself as an animal, thus intensifying the qualities of her two component parts as a human being (i. e. her toughness against external criticisms [subject] and her primitive emotional instincts [self]). Last but not least, her self-description includes a double part–whole metonymy in which a school desk is made to stand for the place where this object is located (i.e. a school) and this institution in turn stands for her childhood. The activation of this metonymy makes the writer appear as a vulnerable child, thus working as a sort of *captatio benevolentiae* and pushing the readers to be on her side (just as people are usually inclined to be on a child's side). Through the combination of two metaphors and a metonymic mapping, Lindo conveys a positive image of herself as an experienced, yet human and, therefore, also vulnerable, journalist, thus implicitly asking for the readers' sympathy.

4.2 Axiologically negative descriptions (criticisms)

In contrast to the above, axiologically negative descriptions show a marked tendency to include metaphorical mappings in their realization. The pragmatic functions of metaphors in relation to critical/negative descriptions are twofold: (i) they can be used to emphasize the criticism, thus intensifying the negative nature of the description; or alternatively, (ii) to soften such criticism. This seemingly contradictory exploitation of metaphors is only to be expected since, depending on the writers' intention and the overall aim of the text, their intrinsic indirectness may pave the way either to an ironical or a polite interpretation.

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1 The PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor derives from the more encompassing GREAT CHAIN OF BEING cultural model (Lakoff and Turner 1989), which pervades our conception of the order of things in the world and structures our vision of the existing relations between human beings and lower forms of existence. Thus, higher level beings possess all the properties of lower level beings together with their inherent properties. At the highest level of the chain of being hierarchy, human beings partake of all the properties of lower levels plus rationality.

In the former case, the negative nature of the description is reinforced; while in the latter, it is weakened. This versatility of cognitive metaphors as a pragmatic/discursive resource will be made manifest in the following discussion.

According to our data, the use of metaphorical mappings as a cognitive/linguistic tool aimed at intensifying the strength of negative descriptions is to be found both in male and female columns. Consider the following examples:

(5) (Carlos Herrera, *El País*, 3 March 2013)
Su presencia callada junto a aquel chico raro de gafas redondas [...] *la promovió a ser considerada como la artista famosa más desconocida del mundo o* el dragón *que vino de Oriente a lavarle el cerebro a John Lennon.*
'Her silent presence by that strange guy with round-framed glasses [...] led her to be considered as the most unknown popular artist of the world or the *dragon* who came from the East to brain-wash John Lennon.'

(6) (Carmen Posadas, *El País*, 10 November 2013)
esos mismos heroicos progenitores no se toman la molestia de adiestrar *a sus hijos en* [...] *lo que antes se llamaba una buena educación*
'those same heroic parents who do not bother to *train/tame* their sons in [...] what used to be known as good manners'

In example (5), Carlos Herrera's description of Yoko Ono makes use of the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS structural metaphor in order to intensify her negative portrayal as a destructive agent. Likewise, in (6) Carmen Posadas exploits the same metaphor in order to highlight her negative depiction of bad-mannered children, who are hyperbolically presented as untrained animals.

As illustrated above, the use of metaphors as a way of intensifying the strength of negative descriptions is found in both groups of journalists, regardless of their gender. Our corpus also reveals, however, that male journalists' exploitation of cognitive metaphors for this purpose is much more frequent and intensive, with 198 occurrences in our data. In some occasions, full texts are structured around the use of certain metaphorical mappings, which not only strengthen their critical intention, but at the same time endow them with a solid internal cohesion. A good example is Pérez-Reverte's 24 September 2006 article entitled *Al niño le tiemblan las piernas* ('The boy's legs are shaking'), where he critically and ironically reports Andreas Casiraghi's humanitarian trip to Manila. His intention seems to be to expose the shallowness of the wealthy royal offspring's interest in the poor life conditions of the homeless children living in the streets of Manila. In order to achieve his goal, Pérez-Reverte consistently

alternates two metaphors in his description of the young prince, namely, the PEOPLE ARE CLOTHES and PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS mappings:

(7) (Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *XL Semanal*, 24 September 2006)
Ya era el momento de que el joven y apuesto vástago carolino exteriorizara lo que sospechábamos lleva en las nobles <u>entretelas</u>.[2]
'It was about time that the young and handsome offspring began to show what we all suspected he had in his innermost self.'

(8) (Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *XL Semanal*, 24 September 2006)
para intuir que, tras esa apariencia frivolilla, esas <u>hechuras</u> de pijolandio
'to suspect that, behind his frivolous appearance, his spoilt brat tailoring'

(9) (Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *XL Semanal*, 24 September 2006)
el joven no se <u>anduvo por las ramas</u> y manifestó su intención de regresar cuanto antes a Manila para seguir haciendo el bien
'the youngster did not beat about the bush and expressed his intention of returning to Manila to continue his humanitarian work'[3]

(10) (Pérez-Reverte, *XL Semanal*, 24 September 2006)
dejándose los solidarios <u>cuernos</u> en barrios humildes
'working really hard in humble neighbourhoods'[4]

On the one hand, by means of the PEOPLE ARE CLOTHES metaphor in examples (7) and (8), Pérez-Reverte conveys the shallowness of the young heir's attitude, since clothes are always associated with the external, most superficial aspects of people. On the other hand, those metaphors in (9) and (10), which map the youngster's behavior onto that of monkeys and deer, respectively, serve to downgrade him and to present him in a derogatory way through the use of specific instances of the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor, thus increasing the strength of the intended criticism that is inherent to the article as a whole.

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2 *Entretelas* refers to a thin piece of cotton fabric usually placed between a piece of cloth and its interior lining.
3 *Andarse por las ramas* literally means 'to walk/jump from one tree branch to the next', in the way monkeys do.
4 Literally, *dejarse los cuernos* means 'to lose one's horns'. This idiom is associated with the particular behavior of some animals (deer, stags) that usually brush their antlers against the trunks of trees or against hard rocks until they are worn out.

Casiraghi's description by Pérez-Reverte is a good example of what Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 104–156) termed cross-metaphorical coherence. The PEOPLE ARE CLOTHES and PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS structural metaphors coherently overlap in the description of the character's shallowness. The systematic use of both metaphors throughout the opinion column also contributes to reinforce the cohesiveness of the text.

The texts by female journalists also included some metaphors used to reinforce negative descriptions through the creation of irony and the downgrading of the individual being depicted (see example [6] above), but to a lesser extent (75 instances). Female columnists tend to make a more extensive use of metaphorical mappings in their negative descriptions in order to soften (rather than intensify) the criticism and to avoid head-on confrontation with the referents of their descriptions and with the readers of their articles. This is a fairly common use of cognitive metaphor by female writers, with 138 instances in the corpus under consideration. The following excerpts illustrate this:

(11) (Elvira Lindo, *XL Semanal*, 10 May 2006)
      aceptando <u>*con los ojos cerrados*</u> *todo aquello que salió de la mente, desde luego imaginativa, del viejo doctor.*
      'accepting *with their eyes closed* everything that came out of the mind, beyond doubt an imaginative mind, of the old doctor.'

(12) (Juana Viúdez, *El País*, 28 July 2013)
      La reforma del sector eléctrico termina de asfixiar a 30.000 <u>*pequeños*</u> *inversores que buscaban un complemento para su pensión*
      'The reform of the electric sector has strangled over 30,000 small investors who were in search of an extra income to complement their pension'

These examples illustrate how female writers avoid direct criticism and confrontation through the indirectness provided by metaphors. In example (11), the structural metaphors UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 48) and BELIEVING IS SEEING map our visual capacity onto our ability to understand reality and to believe something as true. Thus, those who accept the old doctor's ideas *with their eyes closed* are politely presented as irrational people. In (12), the orientational metaphor SIGNIFICANT IS BIG/INSIGNIFICANT IS SMALL (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 50) is used to refer, again in a non-confrontational manner, to unimportant investors. Through these mappings, the writers manage to present the people under consideration in a more charitable, less aggressive way than if more literal expressions had been used.

Another relevant aspect in which Spanish male and female journalists differ is their use of metaphor in humorous self-descriptions. While male journalists hardly ever use metaphorical mappings for this matter (12 occurrences), female writers make an extensive and recurrent use of them (54 occurrences). By metaphorically demeaning and making fun of themselves, women columnists manage not only to create humor in their writings, but also to subtly activate cognitive models of social interaction that allow them to gain the readers' sympathy, exploiting the general social inclination to be on the side of the weakest. The following examples from Elvira Lindo's writings illustrate this:

(13) (Elvira Lindo, *El País*, 3 September 2006)
     En eso estoy <u>rumiando</u> cuando mi taxista va y me pregunta
     'I am reflecting [literally, *chewing*] on that matter when my taxist asks me'

(14) (Elvira Lindo, *El País*, 17 September 2006)
     Yo pensaba que <u>dentro de mí</u> puede haber una <u>cerda</u>, una <u>burra</u> o una <u>zorra</u>, según, pero nunca un hombre encontrará una <u>perra</u>
     'I thought that inside me there could be a sow, a donkey, or a fox, depending…, but never a man would find a bitch'

(15) (Elvira Lindo, *El País*, 17 September 2006)
     Seré <u>perrilla</u>
     'Am I not a little bitch'

Example (13) exploits the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor in order to present the writer's behavior in a humorous way. In (14), Lindo resorts to a combination of the DIVIDED SELF and the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphors so as to describe her inner irrational self in a funny, catching way. Likewise, in (15), the journalist makes use of the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor to downgrade herself and to acknowledge some negative traits of her personality (i. e. her tendency to let her instincts rule over her reason, etc.). Such demeaning self-portrayal is softened by the use of the diminutive, thus producing a comical effect. This opinion column by Lindo serves to illustrate the power of metaphor to highlight certain aspects of the conceptual fabric of a given domain. In this case, the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor helps highlight the most primitive, basic traits of a person. These are somehow softened, thanks to the cross-metaphorical combination with the DIVIDED SELF metaphor, which hints at the emotional/rational nature of human beings, ascribing and limiting the scope of the aforementioned primitive traits to the emotional part of our configuration.

The above is in line with Lindo's own opinion about the different ways in which men and women writers create humor. As reported by Morán (2004),

Lindo stated that, when women write a humorous text, they tend to mistreat, and make fun of themselves. "Women," Lindo pointed out "have a self-destructive kind of humor" (Morán 2004). Men, on the contrary, even if they mock themselves, they always make it clear that they are intelligent after all.

As shown in this section, the analysis of our corpus reveals significant differences in the pragmatic and discourse functions of the cognitive metaphors used by Spanish female and male journalists, respectively. Table 1 summarizes the quantitative results of our study by displaying the number of metaphor occurrences in the realization of the different pragmatic functions. Figure 1 offers a graphical comparison of the results.

Table 1: Metaphor occurrences per pragmatic function (male versus female Spanish journalists).

	Male journalists (number of metaphors)	Female journalists (number of metaphors)
Positive descriptions	6	21
Negative descriptions (to strengthen criticism)	198	75
Negative descriptions (to soften criticism)	36	138
Humorous self-descriptions	12	54
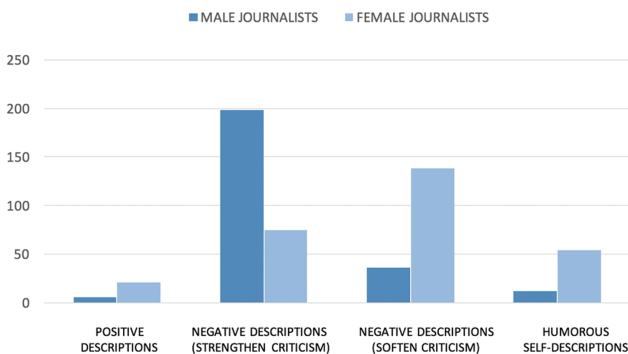
Figure 1: Comparison of metaphor occurrences per pragmatic function (male versus female Spanish journalists).

In most cases, metaphors are used either as mitigating or intensifying devices of the writers' claims. From a gender perspective, a strong tendency has been noted for Spanish male journalists to use such cognitive mappings in order to

intensify their axiologically negative opinions or descriptions, while female journalists make a broader use of them for the mitigation of criticisms and negative claims. It has also been observed that, as opposed to male writers, female columnists show a significant tendency to downgrade themselves through the use of metaphors in a clear attempt to gain the readers' sympathy.

5 English data analysis

5.1 Axiologically positive/neutral descriptions (praising)

The number of metaphors in positive descriptions is significantly higher in the English corpus if compared to the results in Section 4.1 for the Spanish writers. In addition, the ratio of the use of metaphors for this purpose between the male and female English writers increases considerably in favor of the female writers. In fact, the higher frequency of occurrence of cognitive metaphor in positive descriptions in the English corpus is mostly due to its extensive use in the female journalists' self-descriptions. Example (16) below illustrates these findings. Diane Abbott presents herself as an effective activist through a subtle exploitation of the ARGUMENTS ARE WAR (ACTIVISTS/WRITERS ARE SOLDIERS) metaphor.

(16)   (Diane Abbott, *The Guardian*, 20 May 2010)
        I came up through the party as an activist. I [...] am the *veteran* of many grassroots *campaigns*. So I am better placed to engage with ordinary Labour party supporters than any of my *rivals*.

This observed higher frequency of occurrence of metaphors in positive self-descriptions fares well with the already widely attested fact that modesty and indirectness are emphasized in English culture (Li 2009), while Spanish speakers display a relatively higher degree of directness (Blum-Kulka 1987). The fact that both Spanish and English female writers make a more extensive use of metaphor for this purpose than male writers also seems compatible with the cultural expectations for women to be more polite and modest than men (Tannen 1990; Holmes 1995). Cognitive metaphors can be included therefore, together with other syntactical and lexical resources, in the inventory of downgraders that help speakers comply with the Modesty Maxim (Leech 1983: 132) in those languages in which this is felt as necessary (i. e. English).

5.2 Axiologically negative descriptions (criticisms)

The data also show a marked tendency for male and female English writers to use metaphors in order to soften the criticism conveyed by negative descriptions. Thus, our corpus renders a total of 361 metaphors in the realization of this pragmatic function, as opposed to the 174 instances of metaphors found in the Spanish corpus for the same purpose. The number of occurrences is also slightly higher in the case of English female contributors (208 vs. 153). Nevertheless, the cross-linguistic variation is, in this case, more striking than the gender-based divergence. As illustrated in examples (17)–(19), metaphor stands out as a productive device for softening negative claims in the English corpus:

(17)   (Decca Aitkenhead, *The Guardian*, 11 April 2014)
        His critics [...] say he's only easy to work with because he has no burning principles. [...] whenever he says anything really interesting he looks panicky, and quickly tries to *backpedal*.

(18)   Rachel Johnson, *The Observer*, 4 March 2012)
        I was wrong about the *mezzo del cammin di nostra vita* being *the end of the road*. Both my parents remarried, my father reproduced again twice, and he recently celebrated his 70th birthday by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

(19)   (Anton LaGuardia, *The Guardian*, 21 July 2008)
        It allows jihadists *to weave together disparate grievances in Muslim countries into the "single narrative"*: Muslims everywhere are under attack; America, the west and the Jews [...] are to blame.

The three examples above employ metaphorical expressions in order to downplay the criticisms, negative opinions, and/or axiologically negative messages involved in the description of the characters and/or their actions. Thus in (17) the BACK-PEDALLING IS RETRACTING FROM ONE'S PREVIOUS IDEAS/BELIEFS metaphor allows the writer to make a more indirect and polite reference to the person's retreat from his previous stand on the matter. In relation to this example, it could be argued that the "back-pedalling" metaphor also helps to make the criticism more vivid. This is, nevertheless, not incompatible with the fact that the metaphorical rendering of that criticism also helps to soften its negative force. The language of journalism is expected to be vivid, but it can be so in an aggressive or in a non-aggressive manner. In example (17) above, the metaphor softens the force of the negative message via its inherent indirectness. As revealed by the early pragmatists in the 1980s (Leech 1983), the use of

indirectness strategies yields an increase in the level of politeness of the message. In (18) the metaphor LOVE IS JOURNEY allows the journalist to talk about old age in a more subtle way (i. e. "the end of the road") than by referring to death in a direct fashion. This example involves no criticism, but it deals with a concept that is axiologically negative (i. e. death). Referring to death as "the end of the road" serves the function of softening such intrinsic axiology through the inherent indirectness of metaphorical language. Finally, in (19), Anton LaGuardia manages to refer to the jihadists' building of their terrorist narrative by using the metaphor ARGUING/BUILDING AN ARGUMENT IS WEAVING. The thread they use in their weaving is made up of the various "grievances in Muslim countries" (for which, in their opinion, America, the West, and the Jews are to blame). Again, as in the previous examples, the metaphorical rendering of this opinion results in a more subtle, less direct, and therefore, less confronting message.

   In contrast, as shown in examples (20) and (21) below, conceptual metaphor is also used by both English female and male journalists in order to intensify their negative descriptions and portrayals, thus strengthening their criticisms. English male journalists, however, make a much less extensive use of metaphor for the strengthening of negative portrayals than their Spanish counterparts. Thus our corpus reveals that, as regards English journalists, once again the gender variation is overridden by the general cultural tendency of the English culture toward indirectness and modesty. Both English male and female journalists make a similar use of metaphor for this purpose:

(20) (Richard Smith, *The Guardian*, 4 February 2008)
      GPs *smell a rat in their media coverage*. The government is promoting this
      bad image of them to undermine traditional general practice

(21) (Lola Adesioye, *The Guardian*, 8 February 2010)
      If we were still in the era of print media, *Palin may have been a blip on the radar*.

In example (20) the metaphorical idiom "to smell a rat" helps to intensify the unfavorable characterization of the media. In (21) describing Palin as being a "blip on the radar" serves the purpose of minimizing and ridiculing the social relevance of this politician.

   Finally, as regards metaphorical humorous self-descriptions, our data reveal that, in total numbers, this strategy is more frequently found in the writings of English female journalists (50 occurrences) than in those of their male counterparts (32 occurrences). By way of illustration, in a similar vein to the humorous self-descriptions by Spanish writer Elvira Lindo in examples (13)–(15) above,

English journalist Victoria Coren also presents herself in a comic fashion by exploiting the PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor:

(22) (Victoria Coren, *The Observer*, 5 August 2012)
     Did you know that Percy Piglets contain actual pork gelatine? I had no idea. I just happened to look at the ingredients a minute ago, when I started *oinking*.

Nevertheless, the gender-based distinction is not as marked as it was the case in the Spanish journalists corpus, which displayed 54 instances of metaphorical humorous self-portrayals of female journalists against only 12 occurrences in the writings of male contributors. English writers make a more generalized use of this strategy than Spanish journalists regardless of their gender (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

Table 2: Metaphor occurrences per pragmatic function (male versus female English journalists).

	Male journalists (number of metaphors)	Female journalists (number of metaphors)
Positive descriptions	26	91
Negative descriptions (to strengthen criticism)	108	85
Negative descriptions (to soften criticism)	153	208
Humorous self-descriptions	32	50
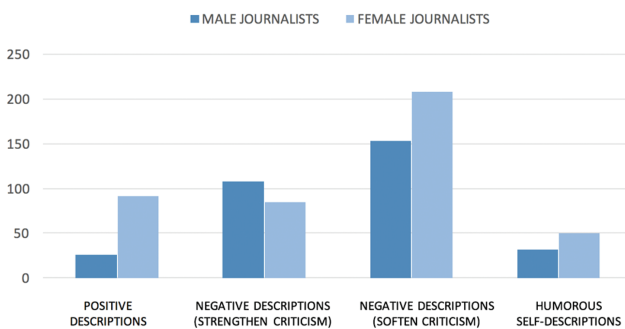
Figure 2: Comparison of metaphor occurrences per pragmatic function (male versus female English journalists).

6 Conclusion

The analysis of the data reveals significant gender-based differences in the pragmatic and discourse functions of the cognitive metaphors used by male and female journalists, respectively. In addition, these differences have also been found to be sensitive to culture and language-specific factors. In most cases, it has turned out that metaphors are used either as mitigating or intensifying devices of the writers' claims. When looking at them from a gender perspective, a strong tendency has been noted for the Spanish male journalists to use such cognitive mappings in order to intensify axiologically negative opinions and descriptions (i. e. criticisms, negative claims, etc.), while, on the contrary, Spanish female journalists make a more extensive use of them in order to carry out the opposite pragmatic function of mitigating criticisms and negative claims. It is also interesting to point out that Spanish female journalists repeatedly downgrade themselves through the use of metaphors in a clear attempt to gain the readers' sympathy. Such demeaning metaphorical self-portrayals are not to be found so often in the Spanish male journalists' texts.

If compared to the results from the analysis of the English data, the above findings are largely modulated by the culture-specific pragmatic constraints at work for speakers of this language. Thus, the analysis of our data reveals the following cross-cultural differences in the gender-based use of metaphor for the expression of the pragmatic functions under scrutiny:

1. When the pragmatic function involved is that of softening a negative description, both male and female English writers make a more extensive use of metaphor than Spanish journalists. Pragmatic politeness theories (e. g. Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987) assume a correlation between indirectness and politeness. According to Leech (1983: 108), indirectness implies optionality for the hearer, which in turn, increases the degree of politeness. Accordingly, English journalists take advantage of the intrinsic indirectness of metaphors in order to soften the negative force of their descriptions, and consequently, to increase the degree of politeness of their writings. Spanish journalists, on the contrary, seem to appreciate pragmatic clarity over politeness, and prefer a more literal, non-metaphorical use of language in their negative descriptions. This is also in accordance with contemporary contrastive studies which have found English more prone to the use of indirectness strategies than Spanish (Blum-Kulka 1987).

2. When the pragmatic function involved is that of strengthening a negative description, Spanish and English female writers make a similar, and relatively low use of metaphor; on the contrary, Spanish male journalists make a more extensive use of metaphorical mappings for this purpose than their English counterparts. These findings are compatible with some well-known

cultural trends regarding the fact that, in the generation to which the Spanish journalists in our corpus belong, it was more socially acceptable for men to perform face-threatening acts (i. e. criticisms, unmitigated negative descriptions) than it was for women. This tendency, however, is not so strong among the younger generations. In other words, although our findings seem to line up with Holmes' (1995) characterization of women's speech as more polite than men's, this conclusion should be contrasted with those stemming from further studies taking into account other relevant factors (i. e. age), which, as predicted by recent social constructionist research on gender (Mills 2002), may largely influence the results.

3. When the pragmatic function involved is that of providing a positive description, English male journalists and, especially, English female journalists employ metaphors much more frequently than their Spanish counterparts, but only in cases in which the description is a self-portrayal of the author. This finding is again compatible with the marked tendency of the Anglo-Saxon culture toward the use of indirectness as a politeness device. Thus, the inclusion of metaphors in positive self-descriptions by English journalists follows Leech's (1983: 132) pragmatic maxim of Modesty, which expects speakers to "minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self." On the contrary, when the object of the positive description is someone different from the writer, English journalists prefer a direct, non-metaphorical use of language, which highlights their positive traits, thus putting into practice yet another of the pragmatic maxims which Leech (1983: 132) associated with the Anglo-Saxon society, namely, the Approbation Maxim ("minimize dispraise of other; maximize praise of other").

4. When the pragmatic function involved is that of providing a negative, humorous self-description, English female journalists use metaphors to the same extent as their Spanish counterparts. However, English male journalists double the frequency of use of metaphors for this purpose if compared to their Spanish colleagues, thus complying once more with the Modesty maxim at work in their culture.

As can be observed from the above generalizations, the cross-linguistic differences observed in the data are closely tied to the English preference for indirectness and the cultural imposition of complying with the Maxims of Modesty and Approbation (Leech 1983). The conclusions drawn here, however, should remain tentative until more texts from more authors are analyzed on a similar basis. The intention in carrying out this piece of research was to open a new and needed line of future studies that should take into consideration gender-based differences in the pragmatic/discursive roles of metaphors.

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Bionote

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